The College of Architecture and Urban Studies warmly welcomes our newest faculty and staff and celebrates our recently promoted employees. For Fiscal Year 2017-18, CAUS had 26 new full-time new hires and 12 promotions.
CAUS ADMINISTRATION NEW HIRES

Richard Blythe, Dean
Richard joins CAUS Oct. 10, bringing more than 25 years of leadership in higher education and architectural practice. Previously he led RMIT University School of Architecture and Design in Australia as dean and professor. At RMIT, he expanded research funding, programs, and international partnerships, and served on multiple government panels and commissions. Previously he was head of the RMIT School of Architecture and Design and a faculty member at the University of Tasmania. Richard is a founding partner of the architecture firm TERROR. He earned a Ph.D. in design/practice-based research from RMIT, a master of architecture from the University of Melbourne; and bachelor's degrees in architecture and environment design from the Tasmanian State Institute of Technology.

Marya Barlow, Director of Communications
Marya leads communications and marketing for the college, working with the college advancement team and University Relations to highlight the people, work, and impact of CAUS. Her duties span college news releases, media outreach, web content, social media, newsletters and publications, and overall college branding. She comes to Virginia Tech after a decade of communications leadership at California State University and The Ryland Group (Ryland Homes) and 10 years as a reporter in local TV and print news media. She is a graduate of Johns Hopkins University (B.A. ’95) and Northwestern University (M.S.I. ’97).

Rachael Estep, Assistant Director of Development for Leadership Gifts
Rachael Estep builds philanthropic relationships with alumni and friends to support the college at a leadership level. Previously, Rachael was the leadership giving director at Kennesaw State University. Before Kennesaw State, she worked in advancement for several nonprofits in the D.C. area, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and the American Physical Therapy Association's Foundation for Physical Therapy. Rachael earned a bachelor's degree in history from Clemson University and her master's degree in public administration from Kennesaw State University.

Erin Poff, Business Manager
Erin Poff joined CAUS on October 25, 2016. Her duties include college compliance with university and state policies as they relate to accounts payable/receivable, prompt pay, Title IX, leave, and conflict of interest training. Additionally, she monitors salary funds, research proposal budgets, annual benchmarking and data analysis, and collegiate-wide systems access and training. Erin has been with Virginia Tech for nine years and has served as the university accounts payable supervisor and AP travel supervisor with the Controller’s Office, as well as the accounts receivable supervisor with the Office of the University Bursar. Erin is currently pursuing her master’s degree in public administration with the School of Public and International Affairs. She received her B.A from Virginia Tech in ’04.

Justina Sumpter, Director of Alumni Relations
Justina leads engagement of the college’s 15,000+ alumni (and future alumni), providing events, networking, and relationship-building outreach and programming. Previously, she served as assistant director of United Way of Montgomery, Radford and Floyd, where she built marketing and development activities, fundraising events, and engagement programs; managed strategic vision and growth; and supported the needs of over 26 New River Valley organizations. A 2008 Radford University graduate, Justina holds a bachelor’s degree in media studies with an emphasis in advertising.

CAUS ADMINISTRATION PROMOTIONS AND NEW APPOINTMENTS

Holly Kobia, Chief Advancement Officer
Holly oversees development, alumni relations, and coordinates communications to elevate philanthropic support for the college, its engagement with alumni and other constituents. She works with the dean, senior administration, faculty, and the college’s advancement team to plan and implement the college’s advancement program and overall fundraising efforts from private sources. Prior to joining CAUS, she spent 12 years as an award winning journalist. Her work as a commercial producer, news producer, reporter, and anchor uniquely prepared her for an advancement career. She earned a bachelor’s degree in communications from Penn State University in Pittsburgh and completed graduate courses in public administration at Virginia Tech.

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN NEW HIRES

Jonas Hauptman, Assistant Professor, Industrial Design
Jonas is an inventor and entrepreneur with over two decades of experience in practice and research. Prior to joining Virginia Tech, he served as director of the graduate program in product design at University of the Arts in Philadelphia. His work is at the intersection of software, hardware, and material. He has been developing and building a range of products and processes that explore the relationship between consumer, designer, and maker. His latest venture, roomio™, is a product that shapes space using the overhead plane while giving off light and controlling acoustics. It is a highly customizable product by a user-driven design interface, which is then produced with hack-able robotic manufacturing tools. He holds a BFA from RISD and MFA from Cranbrook.

Katherine MacDonald, Assistant Professor, Architecture
Katie holds a master of architecture from the Harvard Graduate School of Design and a bachelor of architecture from Cornell University. She is co-founder of After Architecture, a design practice exploring culture and context through design and placemaking. Katie’s current research focuses on material traditions and modernism in the Alps, for which she received the Robert James Euticke Fellowship to study the work of Eduard Goller and the Paul M. Helfman International Travel Grant. Katie previously taught at Temple University, Philadelphia University, and Boston Architectural College. She gained professional experience in the offices of OFIS Architecti, Morphosis Architects, and Lorrain O’Meara Architects.

Elham Meshedzadeh, Assistant Professor, Industrial Design
Elham is an industrial designer, usability researcher, and educator. She received a Ph.D. in industrial design with a concentration in user-product interaction evaluation from Chiba University, Japan. She has taught undergraduate courses internationally and in the U.S. Her research has been published in the Japanese Society of Science and Design Journal (Tokyo, Japan), A Matter of Design: Making Society Through Science and Technology (Milan, Italy), and the Honarhay-e-Taloz Journal of Fine Art (Tehran, Iran). She also has 10 years of industry experience as an industrial designer in her home country of Iran, where she worked on a range of high-profile projects such as product designs for the National Bank of Iran to exterior illuminations for historical preservation sites.

Akshay Sharmas, Associate Professor and Chair, Industrial Design Program
Akshay’s passion for academia leads him to return to teaching in the School of Architecture + Design, where he has been appointed chair of the industrial design program. Akshay received the 2016 Digs Scholar award and taught at Virginia Tech for nine years before taking a position in the design software industry. While at Virginia Tech, he shared his research interest with students and challenged them to help find a program or device to help people living on $2 or less a day. He holds a M.S.D. in industrial design from Arizona State University and a bachelor of architecture from the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi, India.

Robert (Bobby) Vance, Visiting Instructor, Architecture
Bobby combines his professional and research experiences to create a hands-on learning environment. As one of the principal investigators and leaders of the FutureHAUS projects, he aims to transform the way we design, fabricate, and assemble our future spaces. He holds a bachelor of architecture and master of science in architecture from Virginia Tech.

Deidre Regan, Visiting Instructor, Architecture
Deidre received a bachelor’s degree in art history from the University of Virginia and a master of architecture from Virginia Tech in 2004. She practiced architecture in Charleston, South Carolina, until 2013, when she returned to Virginia Tech as an adjunct professor. She is currently working on a Ph.D. in architectural pedagogy.

SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN PROMOTIONS AND NEW APPOINTMENTS

Paola Zellner Bassett, Associate Professor
Paola graduated from Universidad de Buenos Aires and practiced architecture in Argentina and Uruguay. She obtained a master’s from SCI-Arc, practiced in Los Angeles with Norman R. Miller Architects, and, together with Jim Bassett, started Zellner + Bassett, which received the 2010 AIAS Blue Ridge Award of Excellence. She taught at Woodbury University and at the University of Michigan. She is a member of the Executive Committee of the IAWA. Her collaborative works include the installations “Reclaiming Space,” University of Manitoba, Winnipeg (2014); “Luminous Forest,” Artisan Gallery (2015); “30 x 30,” at the 18th IUIA Congress (2015), also shown at the Bienal Internacional de Arquitectura en Buenos Aires (2015) among several others.
Hilary Bryon, Assistant Director for Special Programs, A-D

After earning a Bachelor of Arts in English at the University of Virginia, Hilary came to Virginia Tech for her professional degree in Architecture. She taught in the Foundation Program for five years before leaving to pursue a doctoral degree in architectural history and theory at the University of Pennsylvania. Then and now, her research probe the nuances of drawings as means for both seeing and communicating—she has a particular interest in the manipulations of parallel projection drawings by architects during the 20th century. Hilary is currently an Associate Professor teaching second year design, thesis, and history and theory courses.

Mario Cartes, Program Chair, Core-Professional Program 2nd & 3rd Yrs., A-D

Mario has taught courses in design, building structures and materials, color theory, construction and tectonics at Virginia Tech since 1986. He has served as a jurist and guest lecturer at the University of Virginia and The Alexandria Consortium. His watercolors have been displayed at Hollins University and the Western European Architecture Foundation. In 2005, he was selected as a Gabriel Prize national finalist for his architectural watercolors and sketches. He also serves as a structural consultant for architects throughout Virginia. He holds a B.Arts in Architecture from Washington University, St. Louis, Missouri, and an M.Arch. from Virginia Tech.

Michael Ermann, Professor, A-D

Michael teaches design studio, environmental building systems, and both teaches and researches architectural acoustics. He authored the book Architectural Acoustics Illustrated (Wiley, 2015), which translates the field of acoustics into the graphic language of architecture. He has won design, teaching, research, and service awards for his work. Excerpts of his academic work and the design work of his students can be found at www.michaelermann.com.

Abiola Abosedo Akamu, Assistant Professor, CEM

Abiola received a doctoral degree in architectural engineering from Penn State. She earned an undergraduate degree in civil engineering and master’s in structural engineering from Bayero University, Nigeria. From 2000 to 2005, she worked in firms in Nigeria. In 2005, she joined the faculty at Covenant University in Nigeria as a lecturer in the Department of Civil Engineering. In 2012, she joined the Department of Civil and Construction Engineering in Western Michigan University as an assistant professor. Her research grants focus on understanding, monitoring, and controlling construction and civil infrastructure systems through the development of decision support tools that integrate data acquisition technologies, models, and visualization.

Cassandra Groen, Research Associate

Cassandra earned bachelor’s and master’s degrees in civil engineering from the SD School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City, South Dakota. She earned her doctorate from the Virginia Tech Department of Engineering Education and is dedicated to enhancing the learning experiences for engineers of all interests and all ages. She’s particularly interested in the utilization of qualitative practices, such as discourse analysis and Speech Act Theory, as a means to identify students’ specific career path choices. She joins the CEM faculty as a research associate in collaboration with Dr. Denise Simmens.

Nazila Roofigari-Esfahan, Assistant Professor, Building Construction

Before moving to Virginia Tech, Nazila worked as postdoctoral associate at the University of Florida. She earned a master’s degree in CEM from Concordia University in Montreal and a doctorate in CEM from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. During her Ph.D. studies, she worked as assistant project manager in facility services at McMaster University. Her education and research pursuits are geared toward automating building and highway construction processes. She is interested in the application of Cyber-Physical Systems and smart systems for improving safety, knowledge management and real-time decision making in construction worksho. She has contributed to over 20 journal articles, conference papers, and book chapters.

Gary Kinder, Academic Advisor, Building Construction

Gary is a graduate of Virginia Tech and a bachelor of business administration in marketing from Radford University. Gary grew up helping his dad in the local hardware/building supply store and is currently restoring his own historic home in Radford. Having served the Virginia Tech community for 25+ years, Gary is a proud Hokie and lives by the guiding principles of Ut Prosim: A life lived in service to those in need is a life well-lived.

Ann Marie Lee, Academic Advisor/Recruiter, CEM

Ann is a graduate of Ball State University with a bachelor of science in public relations and a master’s degree in student affairs administration in higher education. Ann has 10 years of experience as an academic advisor. She joins the MLSoc staff as the academic advisor/recruiter for students pursuing the bachelor of science degree in construction engineering and management (CEM).

Aleksandra Markovic Graff, Assistant Professor

Aleksandra received her B.S. in Civil Engineering from University of Wisconsin-Madison and M.S. in Civil Engineering from Ohio University. She has over five years of experience in the construction industry working as a staff engineer and project manager for InterlinkPS, a top-20 ranked engineering firm. While there, she oversaw the ASHRAE accredited laboratory and managed construction inspection and materials testing for large-scale projects in Central Ohio. Her areas of expertise include building construction, geotechnical and materials engineering, and project management.

Andrew McCoy, Professor and Department Head, Building Construction

In addition to his new role as head of the Department of Building Construction, Andrew is a Preston and Catherine White Fellow, the Myers-Lawson School’s associate director, and director of the Virginia Center for Housing Research. A faculty member since 2008, Andrew also brings more than 12 years’ industry experience in construction, architecture, and engineering. He earned bachelor’s degrees in architecture and architectural history from the University of Virginia, and an M.S. in building construction and Ph.D. in environmental design and planning from Virginia Tech.

Wenwen Zhang, Assistant Professor, Urban Affairs and Planning

Wenwen previously was a research assistant at Center of GIS for six years. Her research focuses on leveraging open big data, data science techniques, and data visualization tools to address critical planning issues. Her dissertation explores the interactions between land use and transportation in the era of shared autonomous vehicles using an agent-based discrete event simulation. She has worked extensively in interdisciplinary environments to deliver techniques that can address real-world sustainability problems. She received her Ph.D. from Georgia Tech’s School of City and Regional Planning in 2017. She also earned a master’s degree in city planning, civil engineering, and computational science & engineering from Georgia Tech.

Raymond A. Zuniga, Assistant Professor, Public Administration and Policy

Ray received a Ph.D. from the School of Public Affairs at American University and a master’s in public affairs from the Truman School of Public Affairs at University of Missouri. Ray worked with various nonprofit organizations to promote social justice amongst young people in the greater Kansas City metropolitan area. His research focuses on the interaction of immigration policy/enforcement and educational outcomes for citizen and noncitizen Latinos in the U.S.

Margaret (Maggie) Cowell, Associate Professor

Maggie is the author of Dealing with Deindustrialization: Adaptive Resilience in American Midwest Regions (Routledge 2014) and was previously a member of the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation-funded research project, “Building Resilient Regions.” Her research has been funded by the National Science Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, Kaufman Foundation, National Association of Counties, and the United States Economic Development Administration. She holds a Ph.D. in city and regional planning from Cornell, a master of urban planning from SUNY Buffalo, and a B.A. in urban studies from Brown University.
Stephanie Davis, CPA Program Co-Coordinator
Stephanie conducts research on the impact of federal and state government policies and programs on job quality. She served as a 2016-17 Department of Labor Scholar. Stephanie teaches policy, statistics, and research methods courses. She previously worked as a private sector development specialist in the Latin America and the Caribbean Trade and Finance division of the World Bank and as the Director of the Governing in the Global Age program at George Washington University. She received a Ph.D. in public policy from George Washington University in 2015 and holds an M.P.P. from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

Leisha LaRiviere, Director, CPA Program
Leisha is the director of programs for the Virginia Tech Richmond campus and faculty for SPA and CPA. She teaches master of public administration courses and also leads program development and research efforts in partnership with Richmond, National Capital Region, and Blacksburg colleagues to develop public sector and strategic research partnerships and professional learning programs. She also develops curriculum, state leadership and management programs, and directs graduate mentoring and internship programs. She holds a Ph.D. and M.P.P. in Public Administration and Public Affairs from Virginia Tech and a B.S. from University of Montevallo.

Les Duffield, Visiting Instructor
Les makes documentaries and process-driven installation art that playfully layers kitsch, personal memory, personae, and digital media. This past summer he was awarded residencies at the Santa Fe Art Institute, The Taft Nicholson Center for Environmental Humanities at the University of Utah, and the Icelandic Textiles Center in Blönduós, Iceland. Les holds an MFA from Indiana University Bloomington and a B.A. in communication studies from Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis.

Zachary Duer, Assistant Professor
Zach is an educator, artist, musician, and performer who specializes in immersive environments. He previously taught new media art as an instructor in the Kinetic Imaging Department at Virginia Commonwealth University and served as immersive environments specialist at IGAT. He holds an MFA in kinetic imaging from Virginia Commonwealth University (2014), an M.A. in music composition from Avant College (2009), and a B.M. in music composition from Minnesota State University Moorhead (2007). His artistic work focuses on experimentation in digital technology, multimedia instrument creation, and all forms of collage.

James Jewitt, Instructor/Administrator, Arts Minor
James specializes in the art and architecture of early modern Europe, 1400-1700. He received a Ph.D. in art history and advanced certificate in medieval and Renaissance studies from the University of Pittsburgh. His research has been supported by the Andrew Mellon Foundation, Delmas Foundation, Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Newberry Renaissance Consortium, and numerous travel awards. At Virginia Tech, he has taught courses on the History of Collecting, Landscape Painting, Medieval Culture, and Medieval Art and Architecture. Most recently, he has spearheaded development of the new interdisciplinary Pathways Minor in the Visual Arts and Society.

Phat Nguyen, Visiting Instructor
Phat makes conceptual work that combines both traditional medium and various 3D programs. He received his B.F.A. with a focus in studio art and his M.F.A. focusing on creative technologies from Virginia Tech. Throughout his time at Virginia Tech, he has collaborated on work including creating an exosuit for Virginia Tech’s robotics team, creating animations for ICTAS’ Bat Sonar research project, and 3D scanning T-Rex fossils for the Smithsonian.

Adrienne Edisis, Assistant Professor
Adrienne teaches policy, statistics, and research methods courses. She previously worked as a private sector development specialist in the Latin America and the Caribbean Trade and Finance division of the World Bank and as the Director of the Governing in the Global Age program at George Washington University. She received a Ph.D. in public policy from George Washington University in 2015 and holds an M.P.P. from Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government.

Sonya Sholar, Business Manager
Sonya offers 20 years of experience in administrative, human resource, and finance management roles. She joined SOVA from the Virginia Tech Department of Communication where she served as assistant to the department head. Prior to that, Sonya was part of the CAUS family as the assistant to the director of development.

Travis Head, Associate Professor
Travis makes drawings rooted in the notion of souvenir. His works commemorate lived experiences and those that might be better described as virtual in equal measure. Travis’s work is included in the Drawing Center’s Viewing Program and his drawings and artist’s books have been exhibited nationally. He was awarded residencies at Yaddo, MacDowell, Dieu Donné, Vermont Studio Center, and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. His collective, The Four-footed Fellows Correspondence Club, has exhibited nationally and, in Norway and Qatar. He holds an MFA from University of Iowa and a B.A. from the University of Mary Washington.

Nick Proctor, Project Associate
Nick comes to CDAC after spending three years with the 501(c)3 nonprofit Friends of Southwest Virginia based at Heartwood. As a community development and outdoor recreation specialist, Nick worked with over 15 communities across a 19-county region, assisting communities in capacity building, local leadership development, visioning, project development, and grant management. His efforts became associated with nearly $3 million of public investment in planning and physical improvement projects related to outdoor recreation and cultural heritage tourism. Nick holds undergraduate and graduate degrees in landscape architecture from Virginia Tech with an emphasis on the added value of community engagement in public design.